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The Bl. Negro Martyrs of Uganda

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INTRODUCTION

Although it is now nearly two years since the beatification of the Negro Martyrs of Uganda, the writer of this little study has not hesitated to bring before the public the history of these noble heroes of Christ; and this for two reasons: first, because he has been urged on to the work by more than one who have the interests of the Catholic Negro in America deeply at heart and who are firm in the conviction that the good example of the Negroes of Uganda will do much towards helping on the work of the salvation and sanctification of their American colored brethren; and secondly, because to the writer's knowledge there has not as yet been published in this country any separate history of these sturdy champions, whose lives have been held up to the entire Christian world as models of faith and of chastity by our late beloved Holy Father, Pope Benedict XV.

Consequently, this booklet is by no means intended for Negro readers alone, but it is hoped that it will be of good to both White and Colored alike, that both may take better cognizance of the two great virtues whose neglect is at the root of nearly all the world's direst evils; and that both may be encouraged to higher and nobler things by the example of these Blessed Negro Martyrs of Uganda.

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I cheerfully and gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to Rev. E. F. Regatillo, S.J., of the Pontifical University of Santander, Spain, whose writings and personal encouragement have been of great assistance to me; also to the authors of smaller articles in various periodicals from which I have drawn no little help.

CHAPTER I

The Founding of the Uganda Mission

When Cardinal Lavigerie, the founder of the "Missionaries of Africa," or "White Fathers," accepted the ancient archiepiscopal see of Carthage, reestablished in 1838 under the name of Algiers, he wrote these prophetic words to one of his friends: "My task in Algiers is twofold: one, interior, deals with Algiers herself; the other, exterior, will embrace the whole of Africa, because for me Algiers is but an open gate, leading to a continent in which are two hundred millions of souls to whom we must carry the work of the Catholic Apostolate."

Faithful to his purpose, this tireless apostle, after spreading the Gospel in Algiers, Sahara, and Sudan, determined to plant the seed of Christianity in the centre of Africa. He had been urged on to this as well by the yearnings of his own heart to save souls for Jesus Christ as by the encouraging words of the aged Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, and of his successor, Leo XIII.

It was in 1878, the last year of the life of Pius IX, that Cardinal Lavigerie's new society was entrusted with the mission of carrying the Faith to the unexplored regions of Lakes Tanganyika and Victoria Nyanza; and one year later their first missionaries arrived there. Those to whom Victoria Nyanza was given as a field for their labors, came upon a land which not even their brightest dreams could have pictured. It was the kingdom of Uganda. It was the spot destined by God to give birth to a race of noble Christians, of virgins and martyrs. And God seems to have fitted the country round about to be a worthy dwelling-place for His chosen ones, for He has made it one of the most beautiful regions in all Africa.

Although below the Equator, it has very little of the torrid climate of the Sahara. The temperature ranges from 55° to a maximum of 86°; giving to the region an almost continual spring-time. The green hills, the valleys and fertile meadows, the tropical vegetation with its luxuriant tall grasses and mighty trees surpass description. The numerous rivers are everywhere flanked, and at times covered, with veritable awnings of cane and papyrus. It is in this country, in villages and towns built of cone-shaped, grass-covered houses, that there dwells a race whose intelligence and industry were objects of admiration to Lord Stanley when he visited their capital, Rubaga, in 1875.

The reception given to the White Fathers could not have been more cordial. The king, Mutesa, whom Stanley so highly praised, was all affection and kindness for the Missionaries, giving them all the honors of illustrious guests. With the royal favor they were soon surrounded by a large number of catechumens, eager to learn the saving truths of our holy religion.

Day by day they flocked to the Fathers in ever increasing numbers, and it seemed as if it would not be long before all traces of paganism had disappeared. But that is not God's way. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." It is the same old story of God's way of doing things. Our Lord Jesus Christ began His Church in His own blood. His first children, the early Christians, suffered the bitterest persecutions for three hundred years before He saw fit to raise them out of their sufferings. The same we see in nearly every rising corner of the Lord's vineyard. In China, in Japan, even in our own North America, the Church had first to endure persecutions before she was granted prosperity. What a mark, what a proof of the truth of the Catholic Church! How like unto her divine Founder, Jesus Christ! How well fulfilled is His promise that men should hate her and persecute her!

And so it happened in Uganda. The devil could not bear to see his former subjects being won over to Christ, he must hold on to them at all costs and by whatever means. The means were not hard to find. The king was a selfish and jealous man, and he was surrounded by a group of Mahometans to whom the very name of Christian was odious. Viewing the success of the Missionaries, the king began to grow suspicious of them. He began to fear that they were emissaries from a foreign king, trying to gather his subjects together in order to put him off the throne.

The Mahometans eagerly seized upon the fears of Mutesa, and nourished them, but with another end in view. These men had already become rich by the sale of cargoes of human beings. They were slave-traders, and now they feared that if the Catholic Faith became strong in Uganda — a religion which does not countenance the selling of men and women into slavery — their trade would be ruined.

Things began to grow so unfavorable to the Missionaries that it was evident a persecution was soon to break out which would cost the lives, not only of themselves — they had long ago offered their own lives to God — but also of their spiritual children; so they decided to leave the kingdom till the storm should have passed. Accordingly,

they left Uganda, and took up their work in a neighboring kingdom, where they remained for two years.

At the end of the two years, Mutesa died, and his son, the prince Muanga, renewing the earlier sympathies of his father, made haste to recall the Missionaries to his kingdom. It is impossible to describe the joy of the White Fathers upon hearing that once again they were to be admitted to the land of their labors of love. The new king helped them on in their work, encouraging his pagan subjects to embrace the Catholic Faith, and elevating the converts to the highest offices of the court.

Thus it came about in Uganda, as of old in pagan Rome, that the doctrine of Jesus Christ found easy access to the royal household. The pages in king Muanga's court received it with holy eagerness from the mouth of the Missionaries and strove to model their conduct at the court according to the instructions received at the Mission. This was the beginning of that bright lustre of purity, of that burning faith, of that firm practice of every virtue which was not long afterwards to be crowned by God with the glory of martyrdom, with the everlasting joys of heaven among the angels and saints, near to the throne of the Almighty.

CHAPTER II

The Beginning of the Persecution

But these good dispositions on the part of the king did not last long. Some months after Mutesa's death, the nobles of the kingdom, seeing that the new king was acting against the pagan traditions of the country, and fearing that a strange religion was to be forced upon them which seemed to enjoy the full favor of the new king, formed a conspiracy against him. On a solemn occasion and at a given sign, the assassins were to transpierce him with their spears and proclaim Muanga's younger brother as king.

Three Christians discovered the plot, and hastened to tell Muanga of it, assuring him that he could rely upon their aid and upon that of all their dependents, which in all would form for him a defence of nearly two thousand men. The king summoned the katikiro, or prime minister, who was at the head of the conspiracy, telling him that he was aware of his evil intentions. The hypocrite began to weep like a child, protesting his fidelity and that of all the other nobles. Muanga yielded to this display of tears and pardoned the katikiro and all the other conspirators.

But from that moment the sworn hatred of the prime minister for the Christians became more and more violent. He resolved to exterminate them. For him it was a ques-

tion of life or death, for already the king had manifested his intention of deposing him and of placing in his office the fervent Christian Joseph Mkasa. Besides, the office of commander-in-chief of the army was to be given to Andrew Kagwa, a Christian of great keenness of intellect and exemplary in every virtue.

Firm in his evil determination, the katikiro did all in his power to represent the Christians as enemies of Muanga. He grasped every occasion to engender in the king a fear of Catholicity, saying that although the Christians were meek and humble now whilst they were still so few in number, afterwards, when they became strong, they would depose him from the throne and set up one of their own religion as king.

It is the old, old calumny. It has been urged again and again and is even now hurled against the Church in a vain endeavor to drive God and His religion from the earth. The accusation is false. A million Catholics are as much bound to obey the law of Christ, are as much bound to practise the virtues He came on earth to teach, as are a hundred or a dozen of them. But there was another accusation more weighty, and by no means false, which drew down the indignation of Muanga upon the Catholics. It had its source among the youthful pages of the Court and some others of whom we shall speak.

What galled the king in these young heroes was their purity of heart and soul. Muanga and his Mahometan councillors could not bear to witness the integrity of their lives, the sterling virtue which they practised at all times, the chastity and faith in which they never failed. Especially was his wrath aroused against Blessed Charles Luanga, a youth of scarcely twenty years, and chief of the pages, who never ceased by word, and above all, by example, to inspire his young charges with an ardent love of Jesus Christ and of the virtues so dear to His Sacred Heart.

These chaste youths resisted with vigor all seductions to vice. They would not consent to the abominations and sins of the king and his nobles. They would take no part in Muanga's wickedness. They fled from the sinful pleasures to which he tried to tempt them. This heroic conduct of the pages was the true cause of the king's anger, and it was this that finally moved him to decree that all "those who pray" — such was the designation given to the Christians — should be put to death. And it is for this, too, that our late Holy Father, Benedict XV, in holding up these twenty-two blessed martyrs as objects for the admiration of the world, offers them not merely as martyrs of the Faith of Christ but also as martyrs of the holy virtue of chastity.

And so, in the late nineteenth century, Central Africa witnessed the same scenes of bloody persecution, the same scenes of heroic courage, which another portion of that same African continent had witnessed in the first ages of the Church, nineteen centuries ago. The same land that had given to heaven such glorious martyrs as Saints Perpetua and Felicitas, Saint Cyprian and the martyrs of Ubica, known in the annals of the Church as the "White Host," was now to add to that glorious band the "Black Host," the twenty-two Negro Martyrs of Uganda.

We do not know the exact number of victims sacrificed to God by the cruelty of Muanga. It is believed to be about one hundred and thirty. Of some, it has not been possible to ascertain either the names or the particulars of their martyrdom; of others, there are some data, but not sufficient to cause the Church, which is most strict in this matter, to concede them the honors of the altar. But their names too are written in the Book of Life, and they too enjoy the eternal reward of the virtue they practised on earth, and of the deaths they died for God. Only twenty-two, of whom exact and undeniable evidence has been found, have been given the name of Blessed. In the Brief of Beatification they are divided into two groups; one, of the nine martyred with distinct kinds of torments, of whom the principal martyr is Blessed Matthias Murumba; and the other of thirteen, all young pages of the king led by Blessed Charles Luanga, who were burned together in a great fire.

CHAPTER III

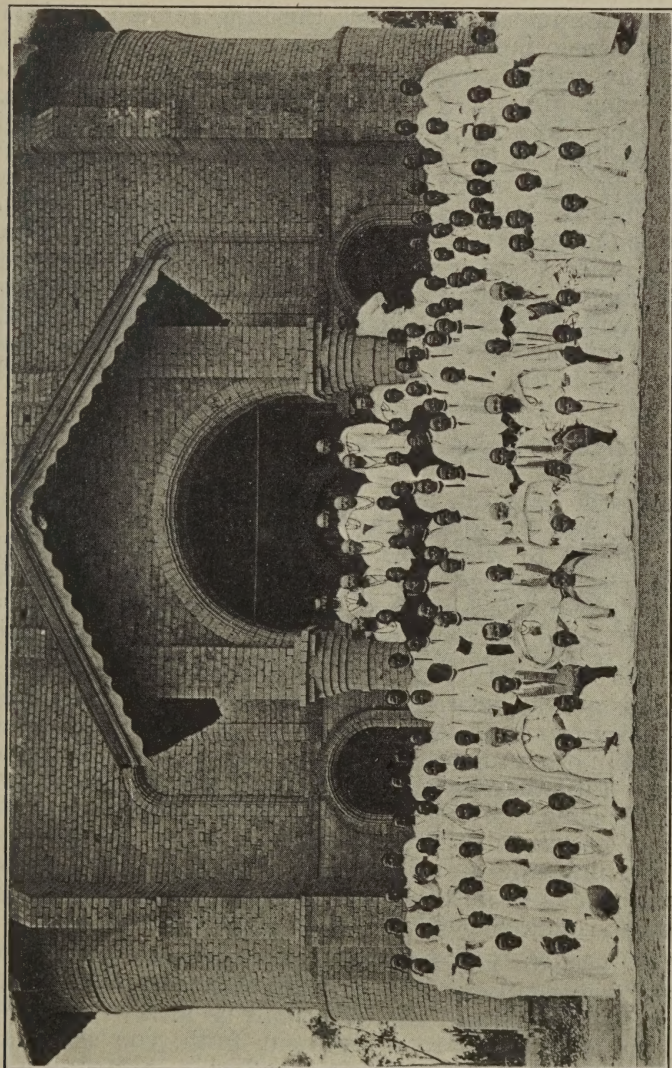
The Martyr Pages — BLESSED CHARLES LUANGA

Among the members of this group stands forth with singular lustre the noble figure of Charles Luanga. He was baptized a Catholic during the night of the 15th or 16th of November, 1885, after four years of instruction and preparation as a catechumen. All who knew him give testimony of his pleasing aspect, of his refined manners, of his sweet and valiant character. Agile, and of uncommon muscular strength, he was unrivaled as a wrestler. Despite his youth of scarcely twenty years, the king had confided to him the leadership of all the pages, who, to the number of five hundred, were in the service of the royal family.

Because of his elevated position he was the chief target of Muanga's hatred for Christianity. The king did everything in his power, by threats, by flatteries, by caresses, to shake the constancy of this intrepid hero of Christ. But, by becoming a Christian, this noble youth had given him-

self to God; he had promised God that he would "renounce the devil and all his works and pomps," and nothing could induce him to break his promise.

But it was not Luanga's chastity and faith alone which angered the king. Blessed Charles was not only the custodian of his own virtue: he was, besides, the guardian angel of the purity of the pages in his care. And as often as king Muanga by his foul seductions attempted to lead them into his own vices and sins, their youthful captain



Philosophers and Theologians of the Major Seminary, Uganda

strove equally hard to keep them true to their promise and to their virtue. Indeed, he was a soldier of Christ very dear to God's Heart, and he has left us an example of courage, of chastity, of faith, which the whole world would do well to imitate.

BLESSED KIZITO

The youngest of the pages was a child of twelve or thirteen, a catechumen of the name of Kizito. He was the son of Kimbugwé, the highest dignitary in the kingdom after the prime minister. Whenever the king summoned Kizito in his presence, the poor little fellow would run to Charles Luanga for refuge, and the watchful Luanga would hide him or send him away on an errand. This was a dangerous proceeding for Luanga, and one for which he might have forfeited his life, but he would at any cost preserve the lily-like innocence of his little charge. Kizito, too, realized the danger, and he realized that such a state of things could not last indefinitely. Some day there would be no errands to be sent upon: some day the king would call for him when Luanga would not be there to protect him. He saw, with a clearness that only faith can give, that the time was not far off when he would have to choose between a life of shameful impurity on the one hand, and, on the other, a horrible death amid torments and fire.

He knew well that he wanted to die for Christ rather than offend Him by even the smallest sin; but he had not yet received Baptism, and he feared that without that Sacrament and the grace which it brings, he would not be strong enough to withstand the enemies of his soul. The Missionaries, however, could not proceed hastily in giving Baptism. The catechumen had to be tried long and well before he could be received into the Church, and Kizito had not been in preparation quite long enough.

In his ardent desire for Baptism, he would grasp every opportunity to run to the cabin of the Missionaries. When once within their doors, he would protest that he would not leave until they had made him a Catholic. "Whenever he would come," writes Father Lourdel, superior of the mission, "he was all tears and supplications. As he stood there weeping and refusing to go out by the door, I had only one means of getting him to leave: I had to pick him up in my arms and put him out through the window."

The desolate child confided his sorrows to Charles Luanga, who counseled him in these heroic and beautiful words: "Be not afraid, Kizito, I shall be always near you. When the time comes to confess our faith, you shall take hold of my hand and we will die together." Although Kizi-

to was baptized both by the Baptism of desire and by the Baptism of his own blood, we have reason to believe that he received also the Baptism of water, for Blessed Charles Luanga himself administered the sacrament to others on the eve of their martyrdom, and it is not likely that he should have overlooked his little Kizito, whom he cherished so dearly both for his tender age and for his manly determination in spite of his weakness, to die rather than to offend Christ.

BLESSED MBAGA TUZINDE

Blessed Mbaga Tuzindé, another of the pages, was the son of Mukajjanga, the chief executioner of the kingdom. Mbaga had not been baptized by the Missionaries, but he was under instruction. He was as good as his father was bad, for Mukajjanga was the most cruel of the torturers in the king's employ. It was doubtless due to this quality that he had received his position as their head. The boy — he was only sixteen at the time of his martyrdom — was an ardent admirer of Charles Luanga and was baptized by him shortly before making the sacrifice of his life to God. We shall learn more of Mbaga and his father in the course of our narrative.

BLESSED BRUNO SERON KUMA

Blessed Bruno is another example of love for the true Faith of Christ. He was, as were all his Catholic brethren in the kingdom, given the opportunity of choosing between the religion which has preserved the whole of Our Divine Savior's teaching, and one of the many sects which broke away from the true flock of Christ. Indeed, a Protestant minister from England had preceded the White Fathers in Uganda by a few weeks or months and was already endeavoring to evangelize the people when the Catholic Missionaries arrived there. Bruno's brother was received into the Protestant Church, while he himself was a Catholic, and from that time on Bruno ceased to live with his brother. We do not maintain that this, in itself, was the proper thing for him to do, but although we cannot know the exact circumstances which led him to take such a course, we know that he considered it to be for the greater good of his own soul. In such a case, his action deserves nothing but praise, and it is quite probable that this manifestation of his love for the one true Faith went far to win for him the grace of martyrdom for its sake. He had been baptized in 1885, about a year before his death. Arrested with the other Christians of the court, he strengthened his companions by word and example. He was twenty-six years old at the time of his glorious martyrdom.

BLESSED JAMES BUZABALAIAO

James Buzabalaiao was baptized but a few months before his death, but in those few months he manifested the sterling quality of his faith by becoming an ardent apostle among his people. He hesitated nowhere in his endeavors to spread the religion of Christ. Every one was a fit object for his zeal. He did not fear to approach even the royal family, and it is to Blessed James that are due the good dispositions of Muanga when that prince first assumed the throne; for, while Mutesa was still king, James did his utmost to convert the crown prince. The zealous youth — he was only twenty years of age — had succeeded in this task to the degree of inspiring Muanga with a love of the “Our Father” and of getting him to recite that prayer every day. However, Muanga thought the Ten Commandments too hard for a king to keep, and so he would not embrace the faith. The young apostle died in the flames with his brother pages.

BLESSED AMBROSE KIBUKA—BLESSED ACHILLES KIWANUKA

Of these two martyrs we know but few details. They were baptized about the same time as Blessed James. Blessed Ambrose lived the faithful life of a good Christian and was martyred at the age of eighteen years. Blessed Achilles was cast into prison after a valiant confession of his faith before the king, wherein he declared he would never desert his religion. He bore the chains and sufferings of the prison with heroic Christian patience. When the time came for martyrdom in the fire, he eagerly made all possible speed to the place of execution, full of joy at the thought of dying for Jesus Christ. He was but seventeen years of age at the time of his death.

BLESSED MUGAGGA

Mugagga, also a page, was a lad of the same age as Blessed Achilles. While still a catechumen, he firmly resisted the impure insinuations of the king. He professed himself a Christian with the others when they were called upon to bear witness to their faith, and with them was thrown into prison. He received Baptism in prison from Blessed Charles Luanga, and, like him, also received the crown of martyrdom by fire.

BLESSED GYAVIRA

Gyavira was one of Muanga’s best-loved pages. Nevertheless, the blessed youth would not permit the king’s affection for him to be the cause of ruin to his own soul, and so he resisted strongly when that wicked monarch endeav-

ored to seduce him into the way of sinful pleasures. For his resistance he was rewarded by Muanga with a sentence of death, and by God with an eternal crown in heaven. While in prison, he made his profession of faith, being baptized by Blessed Charles. He died at the age of seventeen years.

BLESSED ADOLPH LUDIGO MUKASA — BLESSED MUKASA
KIRIWANVU

Blessed Adolph Ludigo Mukasa, twenty-five years old, distinguished himself by the integrity of his life and habits, by diligence and patience in labors. Baptized on the 17th of November, 1885, he faithfully guarded the treasure of his faith and of his chastity until his death in the flames.

Blessed Mukasa Kiriwanvu, page of the royal table, was still a catechumen at the outbreak of the persecution. He was present when Blessed Charles and his companions were being led to their death, but he was separated from the rest, being already a prisoner on account of a quarrel with a companion. Some of the persecutors asked him later if he also were a Christian. "Yes, I am a Christian," he replied. For this courageous confession they made him join ranks with the prisoners already on their journey to martyrdom. Although he had not received the Baptism of water, he attained to eternal glory by the Baptism of fire at the age of eighteen.

BLESSED ANATOLIUS KIRIGGWAJJO

Blessed Anatolius, royal page, was baptized a Catholic on the 17th of November, 1885, at the age of about seventeen years. This holy young man kept the precepts of the Christian life with such firmness that without hesitating he refused a dignity which the king offered him solely because of the possibility of its being of some danger to his eternal salvation. He was well matured for the great grace of dying for Christ and went to heaven through the death of fire.

BLESSED LUKE BANABAKINTU

The last named of this valiant legion of martyrs, and the oldest of them in years, is Blessed Luke Banabakintu. From the day of his first Holy Communion he was conspicuous for the exalted purity of his life, as well as for the gift of speaking of the things of God. Although he had an opportunity of escaping death, he preferred to give his life for the good God who had given His life for him. He suffered in the flames at the age of thirty years.

CHAPTER IV

The Arrest of the Pages

Early in the morning of the 26th of May, 1886, royal messengers were dispatched in all directions to summon the king's council, which was to meet at eight o'clock in the private residence of the king at Munyunyu. At this meeting were present all the dignitaries of the court with their chief, the prime minister or katikiro, many authorities from the provinces and the ordinary councillors, all of them followers of Mahomet. From this secret council-chamber, like to that of Caiphas which rendered judgment against Our Lord, went forth the death-sentence against the innocent neophytes.

Muanga began the session by bitterly reproaching his councillors for the conduct of their sons, who, he declared, were nothing else than traitors. "You should have given me faithful servants," he said indignantly, "and instead you have given me the worst of your families." "Sire," replied a voice, "when we gave you our sons, they were good: if now they are bad, it is not our fault but that of these magicians, the Missionaries. Kill your pages, and we shall give you other and better ones." All present took up the devilish refrain: "Yes, kill them, and we shall give you others!" It was precisely the response the perfidious king desired, but with pharisaical hypocrisy making a show of compassion, he rejoined: "But the young men are your sons, how can I kill them?" The unnatural fathers shouted back their answer in chorus: "Once they are bad, they are no longer our sons: we repudiate them. Kill them, and we will give you others who will serve you better!"

Furnished now with the consent and good will of his council, the depraved king could not contain his joy. A smile broke upon his lips, of which change of humor the courtiers made haste to take full advantage. They fell upon their knees before him, thanking his royal majesty in many words for not holding them responsible for the conduct of their sons, for being satisfied to put the pages to death whilst sparing their own lives. At the end of the session, the councillors were directed to the grand court, Masanguaré, to await developments. Immediately Charles Luanga received orders to assemble all the pages. As some of them were in the service of this or that princess and in various parts of the capital, the matter required some time, but finally Luanga announced that all were present.

Then the king, rising from his throne, shouted in a thunderous voice: "Let those of you who do not pray, remain near me; let those who pray go forward to the pali-

sade." At these words, Charles Luanga was the first to rush forward; little Kizito hastened to join him as had been agreed upon, and hand in hand they walked to the palisade. They were followed by all the other neophytes. In all they numbered sixteen, all but two of them under twenty-five years of age, all of robust health, pure lives and excellent bearing.

"Is it true that you are Christians?" Muanga shouted to them.

"Yes, Sire, we are Christians."

"Are you resolved to remain Christians forever?"

"Yes, until death."

"Put them to death," said Muanga, turning to the executioners, and confirming his sentence by a horrible blasphemy against the Blessed Sacrament.

While the torturers were preparing the ropes to tie the necks and wrists of the victims, Mukajjanga, the fierce chief-executioner, felt — a thing hitherto unknown to him — a painful sensation in his heart. He was a torturer, yes, but at the same time he was a father. He was the father of one of the innocent youths whom he was about to sacrifice. He was the father of Mbaga, a lad but sixteen years old.

"My son," he said, "say that you do not pray, and you will be saved."

"No, father," answered the intrepid youth; "I cannot say so, because I do pray, and I will pray always."

"Then, my son, flee hence and hide in my house."

"No, I will not go and hide; I desire to die with my companions."

The father, convinced that his endeavors were useless, committed Mbaga to his lieutenant Sébatta, who in turn used all his powers to win the youth. "Go away from here," the prisoner said to him; "you are not my father, I do not know you." The tempter had no other remedy but to retire vanquished.

The prisoners took up their march with heads aloft and hearts full of joy. Never in the court of Uganda were seen such as these condemned to death. From the nearby courtyard, Father Lourdel could behold the group. "The heroic squadron," he writes, "marched close by me. Those between fifteen and eighteen years of age were bound together. The younger ones formed another band so compact that they could advance but by short steps and knocking one against the other. As they passed beneath me, they saluted me with a look, whilst I prayed that He who gives strength to the martyrs might fill the hearts of these

young athletes with His grace to persevere in the confession of their faith in the midst of torments."

"Meanwhile my emotion had overwhelmed me," continues the Father, "and feeling my strength growing less and less I was forced to lean against the palisade for support, beseeching the Mother of Sorrows, who had the strength to remain at the foot of the Cross, to come to my aid. As was she on Calvary, so was I now powerless to repress the fury of these murderers whom I saw brutally tormenting their victims. It was not even permitted me to give my dear children a last word of encouragement, and I had to content myself with gazing upon their countenances, in which together with the splendor of strength and of youth were depicted a sweet resignation, a manly courage, and a holy joy."

CHAPTER V

The March to Martyrdom

In Uganda the death sentence is no sooner given than it is carried out. Consequently, the chief executioner gave orders that the condemned ones leave that very day for the place of execution, Namugongo, about forty miles distant. They were to make a halt midway at Kampala, which they reached in the evening of the same day, after a march that must have been as strenuous and burdensome as it was long. They had hardly begun their march that morning, when God in His mercy sent them a great consolation. They had covered but a half mile, when, from a banana plantation along the road, out stepped two men, clothed in skins, and leading a youth by a rope tied around his neck.

It was the catechumen Mukasa Kiriwanvu, who had had a quarrel with his companion Gyavira and had been put in prison. The column was halted, and Mukajjanga, turning to the newcomer, asked him: "Are you Mukasa? The king has ordered me to join you to the others and to kill you because you practise the Christian religion." "Thank you, thank you!" cried Mukasa, raising his bound hands to heaven. "That is what I have longed for." Running up to his companions, he saluted them adding: "But one thing did I fear — that they would forget me in prison, and that you would go on without me." Gyavira, with whom Mukasa had quarreled, approached him smilingly "I am glad to see you, Mukasa," he said, "glad that we shall die together." "Oh yes," replied Mukasa, "how glad I am to die with you!" The two young men were reconciled, and on their reconciliation they set the seal of their own blood, shed in a common martyrdom.

At five in the afternoon the band of Christian heroes halted at Kampala, where they were to spend the night. The executioners took precautions against a possible escape by locking the hands and feet of the prisoners between heavy pieces of wood, which made their every movement intensely painful. Besides, the men determined to keep the martyrs fixed fast to the ground upon which they lay. They accomplished this design by means of forked sticks placed over the necks of the victims, the points of the forks



Bishop Forbes, Native Priests, Missionaries of Uganda, and Seminary Students

being driven into the ground. This cruel proceeding kept the heads of the martyrs painfully immovable throughout the whole night.

It was here at Kampala that the brave little Athanasius Badzekuketta said to the executioners: "We are the meat for the slaughter-house of the King. Our Lord is hungry; why make Him wait until we arrive at Namugongo? Kill me here." As it was the custom of the executioners when they had a group of condemned to put to death, to mark out the road leading to the place of execution with the body of one of the victims, they readily accepted Blessed Athanasius' proposal. "Yes, at once, you shall be the victim," they exclaimed, and drawing him aside a little from the road so that the others could not see him, they transpierced him with their spears and cut his lifeless body to pieces.

On the following day, May 27th, when the instruments of torture had been removed, the necks, hands, and feet of the sufferers were seen to be bitterly bruised and swollen. The most pitiful case of all was that of the page Gonzaga Gonza, whose feet were so badly bleeding and whose flesh, where it had been bound by the wooden instruments, was such a living sore that the onward march had hardly been begun when the brave sufferer found he could not make another step forward. He fell upon the ground and looking up to the executioners, extended his neck as though beseeching them to give him the final blow. They understood his act and with their long knives cut off his head. He exchanged his sufferings for the peace and joys of heaven at the age of eighteen years.

Namugongo was the fief of Mukajjanga. It is a very large village covering the entire northern slope of the hill after which it is named. The place of execution was at the foot of this hill. The village was reached in the evening of May 27th, and there the martyrs learned for the first time of the death of Blessed Andrew Kaggwa, of whom we shall speak later, which had taken place while they were being led out of the king's court in Munyonyu. There also they were told of the deaths of Blessed Athanasius and Blessed Gonzaga Gonza. At this news, joy and pride lighted up the faces of Charles Luanga and his companions. Blessed Charles turned to his executioners, declaring, in words which expressed the thoughts of all: "You do not know what our religion is, for if you did, you also would want to die for it."

In Namugongo, as also happened at Kampala, the prisoners were divided among the soldiers, to better ensure their confinement. Mbaga, however, was loosed from his bonds and taken away by one of his family. Some of the bystanding pagans began to prophesy that the boy would not be put to death because he was the son of Mukajjanga. But Charles Luanga and his companions did not waste their time in idle prophecies: "Let us pray for him," said Charles, "that he do not succumb to the temptation." We shall see that their prayers were heard.

Each of the prisoners was then dragged by two men to the cabin which was to be his prison till the day of execution. In these hovels, the blessed youths were again encased in their wooden instruments of torture, and for seven long days they were kept there, unable to move, whilst but a hundred yards away was being prepared the great pyre in whose flames they were to be consumed.

At the close of the seventh day, the drums of war suddenly sounded. A multitude of timbrels made doleful echo through the village, and clamors and shouts broke

out on all sides. The executioners with a savage yell rushed out from their cabins up to the dwelling of their chief. A great bonfire was lighted, and round about it the fiends spent most of the night in drinking and dancing. Within their prisons, Luanga and his fellow-prisoners now realized that the morrow would be the day of their last combat and of their glorious victory.

CHAPTER VI

The Execution

It was the morning of the third of June. Before the house of Mukajjanga a hundred madmen, covered with their infernal ornaments, made a picture as of a legion of infuriated demons. Their aspect was terrifying: their faces painted with red clay streaked with soot; on their heads great plumes fastened with leathern thongs; their bodies covered with the skins of wild-cats, whilst the skins of other wild beasts served as cinctures; around their necks were huge collars of amulets, and bells and trinkets on their feet completed their horrible accoutrement. Then began their fiendish dance around the fire. A roaring voice intoned a song to the accompaniment of war-drums, and at the end of each strophe a chorus of a hundred demons bellowed out the ominous refrain: "The women that have given them to the light, today they shall weep; yes, today they shall weep."

Meanwhile, the athletes of Jesus Christ were dragged up with ropes about their necks and with hands tied behind their backs. Their faces were wasted and drawn, their bodies were greatly weakened by suffering and hunger; nevertheless, their souls remained firm and strong, calm with the peace of Christ. A gleam of joy lighted up their countenances as, after seven days of separation, they once more beheld themselves in one another's company. They would have liked to stretch forth their arms in a last farewell embrace, but their bonds prevented them. But the brightness of their eyes and the tone of their voices spoke more eloquently than could any other human demonstration. "Oh! how good is God!" they exclaimed, "how good is God, who has so well preserved us all!"

All? Yes; because he who had been taken away, Mbagá, now returned between two of the executioners to recover his place in their midst. This new joy was overwhelming. His comrades, with tears of happiness, pressed around him, pouring forth their warm and heartfelt congratulations.

"Well done!" they cried, "well done, Mbaga, you have conquered the demon. Jesus Christ is pleased with you, you are an honor to His Church."

The drums ceased their tumult, and the dolorous scene began. The victims were stripped of their clothing, and were dressed in a rough covering made of the bark of trees. Once again the drums sounded the signal to march.

One of the many pagan superstitions embodied in the ritual for an execution in Uganda, provides that the executioner touch the head of the victim with a small rod, lest the spirit of the culprit enter into the soul of the king. In conformity with this, the Christians were forced to file past Senkolé, the first lieutenant of Mukajjanga. The rod fell upon all but three. Of these favored ones, Denis Kamiuka is still alive, and holds a high office in the now nearly Christian kingdom of Uganda.

Senkolé, as one of the higher executioners, was given the privilege of reserving to himself the torture and death of one of the victims, which privilege he exercised on Charles Luanga, grasping hold of him, and reciting the formula: "I reserve thee and no other to myself." Blessed Charles was undisturbed. He calmly took leave of his companions, saying: "My friends, I remain here. Farewell. Within an hour we shall meet in heaven." "Yes," they answered with one voice, "farewell until we meet before the good God!"

The executioners then removed the clothing of bark from the Christians. A short march of forty paces followed, and the young heroes stood before the pyre upon which they were to sacrifice their lives to God. At the sight of it a heavenly joy filled their hearts. "Here," cried one, "here is where we shall behold the good Jesus!" "Ah! yes," the others echoed, "here is where we shall see Jesus Christ!" Mbaga turned to his well-beloved friend, the pardoned Denis: "Farewell, Denis," he said, "I am going to heaven." Denis could make no reply. "Sobs choked my voice," he testified later, "and I was overcome with sadness because they would not let me die."

Mats made of cane-stalks were then stretched upon the ground. Each of the Christians, with a readiness like to that of Our Lord when He stretched Himself upon His Cross for us, extended himself upon the mat assigned to him. The executioners hastened to wrap the youths tightly in the mats and bind them. They then bound their hands and feet with ropes, raised the blessed martyrs upon their shoulders and carried them to the pyre, unwittingly imitating, meanwhile, the insolence of the Jews on Calvary by crying out to their victims: "We shall roast you, to see if your God in whom you place such confidence, will come to

relieve you." From the still unlit pyre the voice of Bruno Seron Kuma was heard in reply: "You may kill our bodies; our souls you cannot kill. They will enter into Paradise."

The three pages who had been spared were overcome with grief. They gazed with pain and holy envy upon their companions, protesting at the same time to the executioners: "We too are Christians, put us to death." The men, to console them, wrapped them up in cane-mats, and placed them upon the ground near the pyre, telling them that they would be put to death when the others had been consumed. But both on account of their tender age — none of them was over fourteen — and because of the favor in which they were held by the princesses whose pages they were, the king had commanded them to be spared.

Mukajjanga had not lost the hope that his son would deny the faith. He ordered him loosed from his mat and set free; but the magnanimous youth, baptized but eight days ago, exclaimed to his unhappy father: "The king has commanded you to kill me. Put me to death. I desire to die for Christ." The father with a gesture of despair, murmured some words to an assistant. Mbaga was then led a short distance away to another executioner, who let fall a heavy club upon the boy's neck. He fell upon the ground, and his lifeless body was taken to the pyre.

The victims and the preparations being ready, fire was applied to all sides of the great pile. It was so arranged that the feet of the martyrs should be first consumed in order to prolong the torture. The executioners, knives in hand, formed in a circle about the burning mass, shouting at the top of their voices: "It is not we who kill you; it is our gods who kill you. It is Nendé, Mukasa, Kibuha, who are taking revenge for your scorn!"

But what a different sound arose from the midst of the flames! Over and above the crackling of the fire could be heard the murmur of the martyrs' prayers, borne up to heaven on the incense of their own bodies. With each increase of torment their prayers increased; until finally, like the receding of some great ocean wave, the sounds died gradually away and were followed by an intense silence. All was over. The bodies of these Christian heroes lay in ashes. Their souls, spotless and triumphant, had flown away to the throne of God. Their fight was finished. They had won. And from the hands of God they received an immortal crown, the crown of victory. High in heaven they reign, lords over many mansions. They have left their places as pages of an earthly king, to be the pages of the King of kings, whom to serve is to reign!

The executioners had been astounded because they had heard no cry of pain from the lips of the martyrs. What

will be their astonishment on the Last Day when they behold them clothed in immortal glory, close to the throne of the Most High!

The brutal men then approached the pyre and with long staves heaped up the still unconsumed remains of the martyrs. Upon these they threw new bundles of kindling until the last trace of the bodies was destroyed in the flames. Thus was the holocaust completed. To the "White Host" of martyrs, so called, as St. Augustine says, because of the quicklime in which they were buried alive, has been added the "Black Host," both of them glories of the African Church.

Simon Sebuta, Charles Werabé, and Denis Kamiuka, the three little liberated pages, were taken out of their mats of cane and brought to the king. On their way, at the roadside, they beheld still burning the remains of Blessed Charles Luanga. His torment had been the most refined and cruel of all, for no one equaled Senkolé in the art of inflicting pain. Charles had been burned bit by bit: in the beginning, the flames had entirely consumed his feet before they were allowed to advance slowly to his legs and knees, and finally to his whole body. Whilst this process was going on, Senkolé, so like the Jews on Calvary, said to the suffering youth: "Pray to your God and see if He will save you from this fire." "Unhappy man," replied the martyr, "you know not what you are saying. Look to yourself lest it come to pass that the God whom you now insult, one day cast you into the true fire which never dies." Thus, with heroic forgetfulness of his own pains, with a Christ-like anxiety for the salvation of his tormentor, Blessed Charles Luanga, the chief and leader of the martyr-pages, went to take possession of the kingdom prepared for him from all eternity in the Bosom of God.

This is the history of those inscribed in the Decree of Beatification under the name of the "First Legion." It needs little or no comment. We might pause to make a few reflections, but the reader can do it for himself. Such noble attachment to the holy virtue of chastity and to our holy Faith is food for thought for everyone. There is joy in the thought that within the Church of Christ no discrimination is made of race, color, or age. Let virtue be shown, and proved to have been genuine, and the Church hastens to honor it, wheresoever it may be found. There is joy also, and confidence, in the thought that there are set before us a band of patrons in heaven, who will intercede with God for us, that we too may be faithful to the holy virtue of purity, and to all the virtues, so that we may one day join our martyred brothers in singing the eternal praises of God in heaven.

CHAPTER VII

The Second Legion

1. BLESSED MATTHIAS KALEMBA MURUMBA

The Decree of Beatification enumerates in this group the nine blessed martyrs who won their heavenly glory by tortures other than that of the great fire. Among these, the most notable is Matthias Kalemba Murumba. He had been baptized in 1882 at the age of forty-five, and was the father of a family. Kalemba was properly his name, but he was better known as Murumba, a word indicating his title as chief of the district of Kirumba. His aged father, although a pagan, lived a spotless life, so that, during seventy years in the married state, he never violated his fidelity to his one wife, a thing quite rare in Uganda before the advent of Christianity. When the good old man saw that his life on this earth was about to close, he called Murumba to his side and spoke these prophetic words: "My son, you will see things not seen by me. Men will come from far away lands who are entirely white. They will teach a new religion. When they come, show them a friendly welcome and give ear to their words."

Some years later, the Arabs came to Uganda from the coast, and Murumba, believing them to be the white men foretold by his father, hastened to embrace Mahometanism. But their religion, with its vices and its inconsistencies, gave him no peace of soul; and so later, when the Protestant Missionaries entered Uganda, he decided to follow their teachings. He was on the eve of being baptized, when some men appeared in the kingdom *entirely white* — white of face and white of dress. They were the White Fathers. Murumba ran to them, assisted twice at their catechism classes, and after an interview with Msgr. Livinhac, Superior of the Mission, he recognized the truth and embraced it with his whole soul.

The Sacrament of Baptism worked an almost miraculous effect in him. He who had previously been of a violent character, became a model of meekness. He who filled the office of judge, took upon himself the humble and lowly occupations of the district. In Uganda, work in the fields is done almost exclusively by women; nevertheless, Matthias cared for his banana plantation and potato fields, cultivating them with his own hands in order to imitate the Divine Workman, Jesus Christ. He would bear heavy burdens from place to place whilst a number of servants walked empty-handed at his side; and to one who reproved him for this, he replied: "What, am I not also a servant, a servant of Jesus Christ?"

All the witnesses who have deposed in the process of Beatification are unanimous in their praises of Matthias, both in his capacity as judge and in his private life. "He had," says a contemporary, "honey in his mouth; and his house, like his purse, was open to all." To his goodness of heart and noble humility was added a valor which at times blazed almost into rashness. He once found himself confronted in the middle of a road by a wild buffalo. Instead of fleeing to one side, he took his staff and drove it between the eyes of the animal. Whether he killed the beast or not we do not know, but he who narrates the fact humorously adds that the roadway was freed of its undesirable occupant. At another time Murumba entered a cage of wild animals, took a baby elephant from the care of its mother and walked calmly away.

These outward expressions of courage were but signs of that which was within, a clear conscience and a firm adherence to the principles taught by Our Lord Jesus Christ. Nor did Matthias' virtue stop here. He was animated by such ardent zeal for the spread of our holy Faith, that not only did he bring up his children in a holy life, but he was also the catechist, protector and father of the new-born Christianity in all Uganda. His soul was indeed ready for the great grace of martyrdom.

In May, 1886, King Muanga summoned Mukwenda, the lord of the province in which Matthias' district was situated, to be present at the royal court in Munyonyu. At the same time, the rumors of the impending persecution were beginning to spread about. Thus, when Matthias, together with Luke Banabakintu (whom we have already mentioned among the pages) was designated to accompany Mukwenda's party to the capital, the two Christians bade good-bye to their families in the belief that it was for the last time. And so it was. The two of them were arrested at Mengo, the provincial capital, where they were put in chains, had their hands and feet bound in wooden locks and their necks thrust into yokes. They were then thrown into prison to await their trial. At night, Bwagu, one of Mukwenda's men, brought them some supper. "The two prisoners," he testified later, "seemed not to be suffering, they were talking so cheerfully and joking over their instruments of torture. As they could move neither their hands nor their feet, they asked me to feed them, which I did as a mother feeds her new-weaned child. I rolled the cooked bananas between my fingers and made balls which I put into their mouths. They laughed at their predicament, and thanked me heartily."

The next morning the prisoners were taken before the prime minister, who, having left Munyonyu very early, had

reached his residence in Mengo. Their trial did not last five minutes.

"Are you Murumba, who at your years have set yourself to praying?" Matthias was asked.

"Yes, I am," was the reply.

"And why do you pray?"

"Because I wish to."

"They say that you have dismissed all the women-servants from your household and that you yourself prepare the meals."

"And what of that?" answered Matthias. "Have they delivered me to the tribunals because I am thin, or because of my religion?"

The judge was incensed at Matthias' firmness. "Executioners," he shouted, "bind him and kill him at once!"

Blessed Luke was treated in like manner, and the two left the courtroom radiant with holy joy. They were ordered to join the ranks of Charles Luanga and his companions, who had passed that very night on the neighboring hill of Kampala. Mukajjanga commanded his men to bring the two victims with all haste so as to join the pages, but when they reached Kampala, Matthias stopped and addressed the executioners. "I am one of Mukwenda's men," he told them; "the king does not know me, and I have no one at court to plead my cause. Hence I have no hope of respite or pardon. What is the use of going any farther? Put me to death here." When Mukajjanga was informed of this, he exclaimed: "So he does not want to go any farther? Cut off his legs and arms, then, cut them off!" This gruesome order was promptly obeyed. His arms were cut off at the wrists, then at the elbows, and his legs at the knees. The executioners charged with the task afterwards related that while the hatchets were entering the flesh and breaking his bones, Matthias uttered no word of complaint, but kept repeating: "My God! My God!" The two executioners, according to their own testimony, were so vexed at the martyr's courage that they carried their inhumanity to such an extent as to cut off pieces of flesh from his breast and shoulders and fling them into a fire before the sufferer's eyes! To prolong his torments they bound the veins and arteries of the dying man and abandoned him upon a rugged and lonely hill.

Three days later, a native passing by the place heard a groaning voice pitifully crying out, "Water! Water!" It was Matthias, repeating the "I thirst" of Christ on the Cross. The passer-by drew near, but, upon seeing the awful spectacle, fled precipitately. Blessed Matthias, in our opinion, has rightly deserved a place among the greatest of

Christian martyrs both for his mature virtue and for the greatness of his sufferings.

2. BLESSED NGONDWE — BLESSED ANDREW KAGWA

The deaths of the pages Athanasius Badzekuketta and Gonzaga Gonza have already been related. Of Pontian Ngondwé, royal page, little is known save that he was conducted with the other pages to the hill of Namugongo. While on the way, he frequently confessed his faith in Jesus Christ, which so angered his tormentors that they transpierced him with their lances and threw his body by the wayside not far from the great fire.

Blessed Andrew Kagwa was highly esteemed by the king for his excellent gifts of intelligence and industry. Having received the three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist on the same day, he began immediately to manifest the effects these sacraments had wrought in his soul. Although he was lord of Kigowa, he not only taught the catechism to his subjects, but during the plague which infested the region at that time, he went from house to house, serving the sick with exquisite charity, and making himself all to all. The great number of souls he sent to heaven by baptizing them at the point of death, and the number of dead he buried with his own hands, are written in letters of gold in the Book of Life.

It was not long before this sturdy Christian was summoned to make confession of his faith. It happened that he was discovered in the act of teaching the catechism to the sons of the prime minister. When the katikiro heard of this, he flew into a violent passion and at once obtained the king's leave to put Kagwa to death. Rushing out to the executioners, he declared that he would not touch a morsel of food until they brought him the martyr's hand, severed from his dead body. The executioners hesitated, but the intrepid Andrew encouraged them. "Come," he said, "your master is hungry, have you not heard from him? If he should ask you to get him a wild goat to eat, would you not rush forward to serve him? Bring him now the pittance without which he cannot eat. Put me to death." An eye-witness gives this testimony: "I saw Andrew Kagwa going out of the hall of the tribunal with his face radiant with joy. He was surrounded by eight executioners. Not ten minutes had passed when one of the men returned bearing an arm cut off at the shoulder joint." The katikiro could now take his place at table. Blessed Andrew after more and barbarous mutilations was left to consummate his holy martyrdom in the fire. He had prepared himself for his triumphant journey to heaven by receiving Holy Com-

munion the night before his death. He was martyred at the age of fifty.

3. BLESSED NOE MAWGALLI

Blessed Noe Mawgalli was an artisan engaged in making the vessels for the table of Mukwenda. As the Apostolic Decree has it, he was a man who "shone brightly in



Msgr. Forbes with the Three Priests Ordained June 6, 1920, at the Time of the Beatification of the Negro Martyrs of Uganda

all the Christian virtues." He was baptized on All Saints' Day, 1885, and seven months later, in May, 1886, he fell a victim to Muanga's cruelty. Being taken in his own home by the king's soldiers, he was straightway transpierced with lances. He was thirty years old.

4. BLESSED JOSEPH MKASA BALIKUDEMBE

Blessed Joseph on account of his never failing fidelity, had been chosen by the former king, Mutesa, as his personal attendant. Day and night, in health as well as in sickness, the king would not permit his trusty servant to be away from him. Muanga inherited Mutesa's attachment to the young man, conferring on him the office of major-

domo of the palace, and giving him, besides, supreme charge of the five hundred pages who were under the more immediate guidance of Blessed Charles Luanga. Joseph's charity was proverbial in Uganda. Not a week passed by, after his conversion to Christianity, in which he had not ransomed one or more slaves at his own expense. After paying their ransom, he instructed them in the truths of our holy religion and gave them their liberty. "Of all those who taught catechism," deposed various witnesses, "he was the wisest and most listened to. He used to teach at night, for the duties of the day gave him no other time for giving instructions."

He was baptized a Catholic on the 30th of April, 1882, and received the Sacrament of Confirmation on the same day. During the remainder of his life he approached the Holy Table with frequency and fervor. It was his zeal for the souls of the pages, like that of Blessed Charles Luanga, which finally won for him the crown of martyrdom. He was constantly exhorting the youths in his care not to follow the wicked ways of the king, but to keep their souls pure and pleasing to God. When Muanga learned of these exhortations, he began at once to loosen the bonds of friendship that had till then so closely bound the two together. From that time it was but a step to the death-sentence, and the katikiro, who was jealous of Joseph, induced the king to take that final step. On the 15th of November, 1885, the order came from Muanga that Joseph should die before the dawn of the following day.

During that night the martyr fortified himself by receiving the Sacred Body of Our Lord. When the executioners came at length to put him in chains, he exclaimed: "What, do you think that I, who am dying for my religion, would seek to escape? A Christian who gives up his life for God has no fear of death." He was led that night to Mengo, where after forgiving the king and exhorting him to do penance, he was beheaded and his body reduced to ashes by fire. That he was not tortured before his death was due to Mukajjanga's orders, for the chief executioner, despite his natural ferocity, had a place in his heart for the saintly youth whom every one loved. Joseph was twenty-six years old at the time of his death and was the first of the victims of the persecution in the order of time.

BLESSED JOHN MARY MUZEI

John Mary Muzei was one of the most gifted of the Christians of Uganda. He was not over thirty in years, but his grave aspect and high intelligence won for him the surname of Muzei, "the old man." Blessed John furnished

a rare example of prudence, sweetness of character, generosity to the poor, and love for the sick. His money and his labors were employed in redeeming slaves and instructing them in the Faith. It is said of him that his memory was so prodigious that one day sufficed for him to learn the whole of the catechism of twenty-four pages.

When his dear friend, Joseph Mkasa, was put to death, John became convinced that the same lot was soon to be his own, but despite this conviction, he could not bring himself to separate from the Missionaries or to flee the neighborhood of the Mission. On January 27, 1887, Blessed John and a companion happened to be seen by the king, who immediately ordered them to appear before the prime minister on some pretext or other, and, although the Christian suspected a snare, he determined for the sake of his religion to show himself unafraid. Bidding a fond farewell to his friends, he went to the katikiro's residence. A pool in the prime minister's courtyard became a martyr's tomb.

BLESSED DENIS SEBUGGWAO

The last named in the Decree of Beatification is Denis Sebuggwao, a boy of sixteen years, who was baptized a Catholic on Nov. 17, 1885. His pure soul was filled with the same holy charity and ardent zeal we have noted in his companions, the martyred pages. On May 26, 1886, King Muanga, on his return from the hunt, called the prime minister's son, Mwafu, and asked him, "Where have you been, Mwafu?"

"I was at the house of Kisele, the gunsmith," answered the page, "where Denis Sebuggwao teaches me the catechism."

"The catechism?" replied the king, angrily. "Send in Denis to me."

When the holy youth came into the king's presence, he was asked, "What were you doing with Mwafu?"

"I was teaching him the catechism," came the sturdy reply.

"What, unfortunate wretch!" cried the king, "you are teaching what I have forbidden to be taught, and he whom you are perverting is the very son of the katikiro!" And snatching a poisoned spear from the hands of an attendant, the wicked king plunged it into Denis' throat. He then turned to the attendant and ordered him to take the boy away and give him the finishing stroke. A Mussulman named Kyayambad dragged the youth beyond the enclosure, where at the stroke of the knife, Blessed Denis gave up his pure soul to God.

CHAPTER VIII

"The Blood of Martyrs the Seed of Christians"

Such is the glorious army of Christian martyrs upon whom the Church has conferred the title of Blessed with the honors of the altar. Two things remain to be mentioned: we must see how the old proverb of Tertullian, "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians" has been fulfilled in Uganda; and we must witness in spirit the glorious scene at St. Peter's in Rome, where amidst the splendor of the Church and thousands of devout Catholics, these glorious heroes of Uganda were given to the Christian world as Blessed worthy of our veneration, and held up for our imitation. For the first fact I quote somewhat at length from the Pontifical Decree.

"Whoever shall have read the acts of the martyrs," writes our late beloved Holy Father, Benedict XV, "cannot but behold in admiration, with what wisdom, with what tranquil constancy of mind, and with what a spirit of faith they replied to the questions of the king and his prime minister; how in them was fulfilled the divine promise of Christ, 'it shall be given to you in that hour what to speak.' (Matt. c. 10, v. 19.) It is also clear that wonderful signs of Divine intervention have followed their glorious martyrdom; for not only has it appeared that God has punished the persecutors with a most wretched death which corresponded in an astonishing degree to the very kind of tortures they had inflicted on their victims; but also that after the martyrdom of the twenty-two Negroes such an ardor to embrace the Catholic Faith has sprung up in Uganda that, according to the testimony of the natives themselves, it must be attributed to the blood of the martyrs that the nation has turned from its paganism. Day by day, our holy religion is being more widely spread so that now, thirty-four years after the martyrdom, several hundred thousands of neophytes and catechumens can be numbered." *

Indeed "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians." When men make the supreme sacrifice of their lives to God, when they remain firm in their fidelity to Him to the extent

*) Complete statistics taken during 1919 are as follows: 2 bishops, one being vicar apostolic; 118 White Fathers; 10 native negro priests; 40 European sisters; 117 native sisters; 1314 catechists; a minor seminary with 72 students; a major seminary with 42 students of philosophy and theology; a normal school; a college of English with 182 students; 713 primary schools with an attendance in each ranging from 20 to 164 pupils. During the year 1919, Holy Communions were distributed to the number of 2,850,310.

of shedding their blood, the Heart of God is moved with such abundance of love for His children that He cannot refrain from pouring out His blessings upon their people and upon their country. To-day there are in Uganda more than 200,000 baptized Catholics, and over 100,000 preparing for Baptism. The hierarchy is well organized, schools and churches are numerous, and the country is happy in the enjoyment of true Christian peace.

CHAPTER IX

The Beatification

On the 6th of June, 1920, the great Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome presented a scene of unrivaled majesty and beauty. Thirty thousand Catholics of all climes and nations had gathered to join with our Holy Mother the Church in thanking and blessing God in His Negro Martyrs of Uganda. It was the day of their beatification. Shortly before ten in the morning, vast numbers of candles and electric lamps were lighted, their effect causing a murmur of admiration from the reverent throng. Then entered a long line of cardinals, bishops, and other dignitaries of the Church, followed in solemn state by the Holy Father himself. Special places had been reserved near the throne of the Holy Father for the White Fathers and White Sisters of Africa, whose heroic work in the Uganda Mission is best told by the fruits of faith and virtue it has produced. Among those present were Msgr. Livinhac, who witnessed the martyrdom, and Msgr. Streicher, the actual Vicar Apostolic of Uganda.

Over the altar there hung a veiled picture representing the martyrs in heavenly glory. In the right and center of a great cloud kneel the twelve pages with their leader, Blessed Charles Luanga, all bearing in their hands the lily of holy purity. To the left, the nine other martyrs with Blessed Matthias Murumba at their head wave the palm of faith and victory before the refulgent throne of the Most Blessed Trinity. Beneath the cloud is seen the terrestrial globe encircled by the equator, the regions of Victoria Nyanza and Uganda being represented by a flaming pyre.

At the stroke of ten, Father Burtin, postulator of the cause, entered the Basilica. He was accompanied on either side by a Negro dressed in long robes of black silk fringed with gold, the official dress of high dignitaries of the kingdom of Uganda. About their necks hung the insignia of the order of St. Gregory, a papal decoration conferred on them by Pope Benedict XV.

Both of them are confessors of the faith. The elder, Joseph Nsingisira, the father of twelve children, is at present governor of a province of Uganda. When the persecution of the Christians broke out in 1886, Joseph was urged to go in hiding; but protesting his fidelity to the faith, he presented himself to the king and declared himself a Christian. The king ordered him put to death, and the sentence would have been executed, had not the influence of Joseph's family, together with the pleading of the princess whose secretary he was, as well as those of the prime minister himself, stayed the wrath of the king. The sentence was then commuted to a long imprisonment. He lay in prison most of the time in chains and stocks, for a period of two years. At the end of that time, Muanga, having already been once dethroned by the natives and imprisoned by British soldiers, was again dethroned and exiled to the island of Sechelle in Lake Victoria, where he died a victim of his own vices at the age of thirty-four years. It was this exile that brought liberty to Joseph.

Denis Kamiuka, the younger of the two confessors, whose name has already appeared in the course of this study, is still in the full vigor of his fifty years of a holy life. He is the father of a family of fourteen children and holds the office of sub-governor in the kingdom. He, too, when a page fourteen years of age, was warned to flee for his life. But he merely made reply to his well-wishers: "I am a Christian: I will confess my faith." The lad was condemned with the other pages and was actually brought to the great fire at Namugongo. But the queen-mother's intercession prevailed with the king, who granted her request on the condition that the lad be brought to the place of torture in the belief that he was going to be put to death, in order if possible, to frighten him into denying his faith. When Denis finally discovered that he had been pardoned, his grief was so great that the executioners, to console him, wrapped him up in a mat of cane, telling him that he should be put to death after the others had been killed. It has been his life-long regret that he was not made a martyr for Jesus Christ.

But God reserved these two noble confessors to bear witness to the martyrdom of the others, for though other testimony was not wanting, it is possible that without them the Negro martyrs would not have been given the honors of the altar.

When the two Negroes had taken the places of distinction reserved for them, Father Burtin approached the Cardinal of Sacred Rites and asked if he should proceed with the reading of the Decree. The permission being formally given, Msgr. de Horatiis, the Vatican Archaeologist, ascen-



The Two Confessors of the Faith, Joseph Nsingisira (left) and Denis Kamiuka

ded the pulpit and, in a loud clear voice, gave a brief history of the acts of the martyrs, ending with the pronouncement of the formal Decree of Beatification. This was followed by the solemn chanting of the *Te Deum*. The moment was an impressive one. A thousand new lights burst out in the sanctuary, the veil fell from the picture over the altar, and all present fell upon their knees to thank God for His new martyrs.

After the *Te Deum* and the Hymn of the Martyrs composed for the occasion, the Holy Father sang the Pontifical Mass of the new Martyrs. In it were named Blessed Charles and Blessed Matthias, as being leaders among the Martyrs. It is the custom on such occasions for the cardinals and prelates to distribute pictures and biographies of the newly beatified, but it was by a happy inspiration that this office was given to the little Pages of St. Aloysius, who, costumed in cape and sword, did honor to their brother pages of Uganda. Another beautiful and significant fact was the ordination that same day of three natives of Uganda to the Sacred Priesthood.

The Solemn Benediction in the evening was equally impressive. The Basilica was again thronged with people and again honored by the presence of the Holy Father. Eighteen cardinals, many bishops, the French and English ambassadors, and a number of diplomatic representatives also attended. After the Solemn Benediction, Fr. Burtin, Msgr. Streicher, and the two Negroes bore their gifts to the Holy Father. Fr. Burtin gave a beautiful bouquet of roses, lilies, and palms, symbolic of the virtues of the martyrs; Msgr. Streicher presented a painting of the Martyrs, made on silk. One of the Negroes bore a box containing a relic of Blessed Charles (the only one of whom relics could be found), and the other a handsomely bound history of the lives and deaths of the black heroes.

The Holy Father accepted the gifts and taking the reliquary pressed it to his lips. He then paused for a time to speak with the donors, during which conversation Fr. Burtin inquired after his Holiness' health. The Pope had been suffering from rheumatism, but raising his arm, he made a great sign of the cross without effort, exclaiming, "See, my arm is entirely well today: the blessed Martyrs have cured me!"

When the Holy Father had retired, the two Negroes received a hearty ovation. Bishops, priests, and people pressed in on them from all sides, eager to kiss their hands or their garments. When after considerable difficulty they made their way out of the Basilica, the enthusiasm increased and the joyous crowd burst into cheers. "Long live the Martyrs of Uganda!" they cried, "Long live the Negro Christians!"

Long live the Catholics of Uganda!" The two confessors of the Faith were overcome with emotion at the reverence and affection which were everywhere shown them. "It is through us," they explained modestly, "that the people wish to honor the memory of our Blessed Ones!"

Thus ended a day of supreme joy, not only for the people of Uganda and of Rome, but for all Catholics the world over, and especially for the Negro Race, to whom the Blessed Martyrs of Uganda will ever remain a brilliant host of Christian heroes, models of all the virtues, and heavenly patrons to be called upon in all needs of body and soul.



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